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Rocky Mountain House

National Historic Site

MANAGEMENT PLANNING PROGRAM

message from the superintendent

Canadian Parks Service is developing a plan to manage Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site. As the superintendent and a longtime employee of the park, I am pleased to provide you with this newsletter designed to inform you of our progress.

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada recommended in 1926 that, in view of its connection with early trade, discovery, and exploration, the site be declared of national importance. In 1968, the board further recommended that the site be acquired by the Government of Canada and administered under the National Parks Act.

Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site protects a 228-hectare historic landscape containing four known historic forts, one burial ground, an unknown number of buried cultural remains and a host of natural landscape features. The site offers a pleasing locale for enjoying historic resources in a pleasant outdoor setting.

Since the early 1980s, our programs, activities and services have expanded. Management issues have become more complex. Visitation to the west-central area of the province is on the rise. These and other trends have affected, and will continue to affect, Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site.

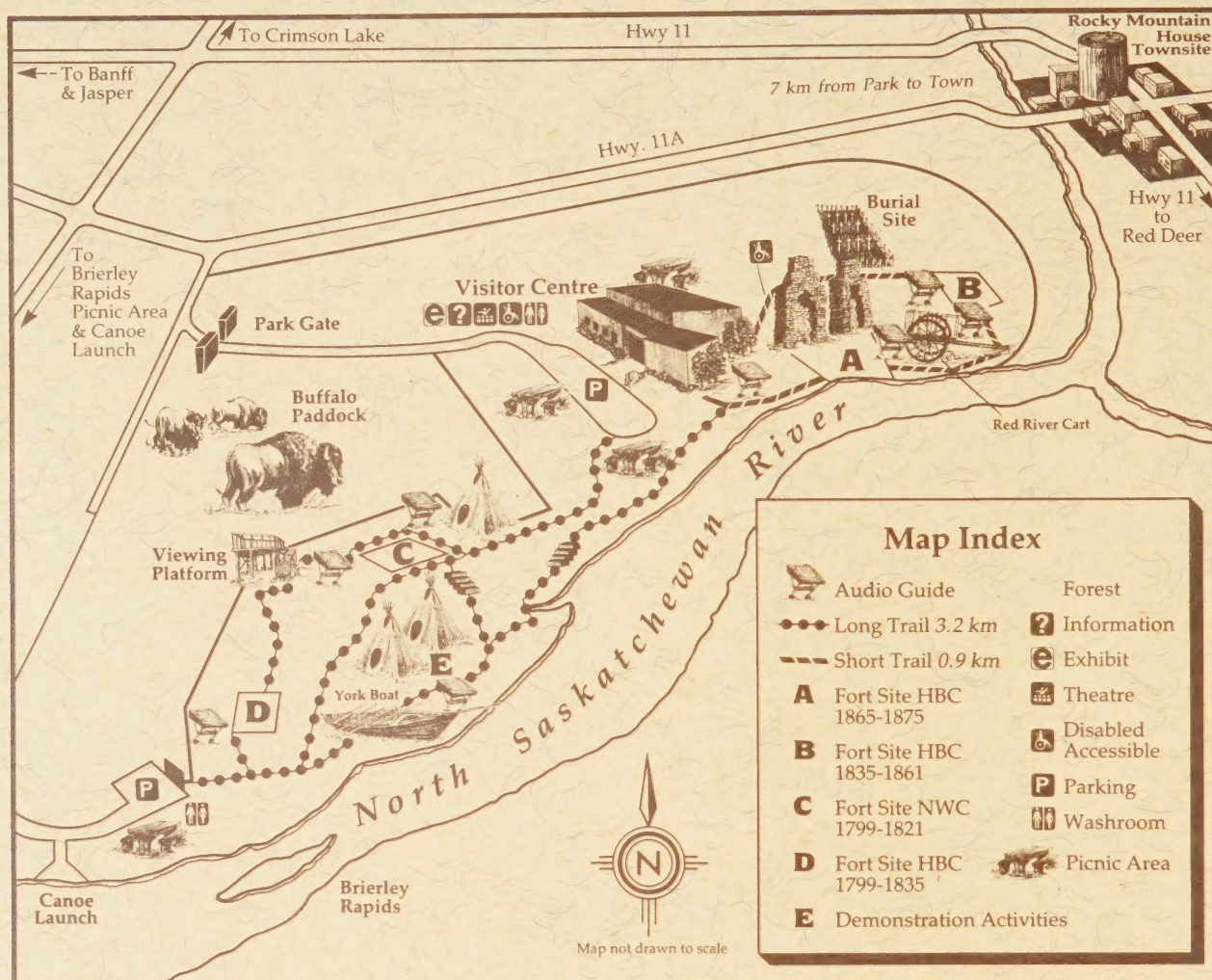
The challenge we face at Rocky Mountain House today is to enhance the presentation of fur trade exploration and native history in a historically accurate manner, without either destroying the site's archaeological resources or misrepresenting its historic themes.

This newsletter describes the major steps in the management planning program underway at Rocky Mountain House and summarizes the site's approved Themes and Objectives. It reports on the June, 1990 open house held in Rocky Mountain House, and on a survey conducted among visitors and others during the summer of 1990. Also found in this newsletter are results of historic and archaeological research to date, and summaries of historic and natural resource inventories. These sources of information, coupled with the results of future public consultation programs, will be used to produce the Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site Management Plan.

Thank you for your interest in Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site. It is my sincere hope that we in the Canadian Parks Service, by taking the time to share information with the public, can build a greater awareness and appreciation of Rocky Mountain House and of other sites of national historic significance across the province and the nation. Your involvement is essential to our decision-making process. I hope you will participate in future meetings, and that you will encourage your colleagues to get involved as well.



Dan Gaudet
Superintendent



What is management planning ??? ...

A management plan provides long-range strategic direction for the future management, use and development for a site and its resources. It is a public document that sets out specific guidelines, in accordance with the National Parks Act, National Historic Sites and Monuments Act and related policies, on appropriate site activities.

The main objective of every plan is to establish a framework for protection of the cultural and natural resources that are the reason for the site's establishment. Further, a management plan gives direction for the provision of visitor facilities and services, such as trails, services for disabled visitors and interpretation programs.

In developing a management plan, the Canadian Parks Service considers trends affecting visitor use, assesses concerns of a local and regional nature,

and analyzes information regarding the character and significance of the site's resources.

Consultation with the public is an integral part of the management planning process. Public comments are one of several important factors considered when decisions are made about the site.

Park management plans are submitted to the Minister of the Environment for approval.

The schedule for completion of the Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site Management Plan is:

- Development of plan concepts by the summer of 1991.
- Open house in the fall of 1991.
- Finalization of the plan during the winter of 1991/92.

Public involvement plays a critical role

Because national parks and national historic sites are established for the benefit of all Canadians, public input into their management plans is essential. The Canadian Parks Service fully supports the principle of public involvement and is committed to provide opportunities for the public to review and comment on planning proposals.

Public consultation for Rocky Mountain House management planning got underway on June 21, 1990, with an open house at the Rocky Mountain House town library. The open house was advertised both in the local paper and at the historic site.

Rocky Mountain House's Themes & Objectives, the management plan Terms of Reference and the proposed planning and public consultation program were available for review. Participants were encouraged to raise any concerns they had with regard to the site and the proposed planning program. They were also informed that Canadian Parks Service staff would be available to meet and discuss any issues, if requested.

Despite the low turnout at this open house, several useful points were raised:

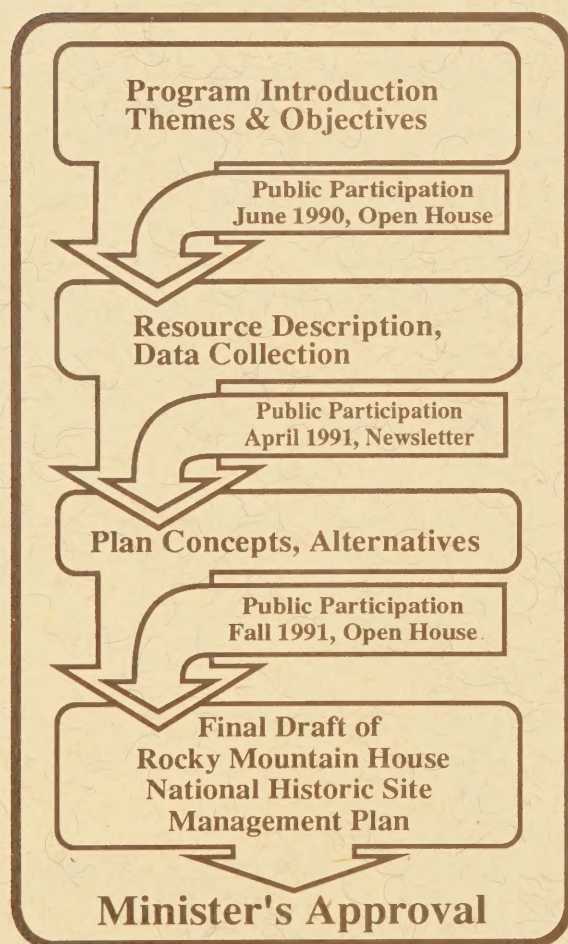
- **Interpretation** — It was suggested that the site expand active interpretation and other programs involving the visitor.
- **Land use management** — There was disagreement over recent land management practices at the site.
- **Natural resources** — It was pointed out that the Rocky Mountain House area is well known for its wild orchids.
- **Visitation and local tourism** — It was thought that visitation to the site would have positive spin-offs for the area. There was a suggestion to improve cooperation with the local community in order to boost area tourism.

Further opportunities to become involved will be through:

- Your review of the information in this newsletter.
- Any informal meetings you arrange with parks service staff.
- Your comments on the upcoming plan concept/alternatives stage of the management planning program.
- The submission of written comments to either of the addresses noted on the back page of this newsletter.

At every stage, your comments are appreciated. Please take these opportunities to get involved!

The Planning Process



Rocky Mountain House's themes and objectives reflect national historic significance

Each national historic site commemorates some aspect of Canadian history. The Canadian Parks Service uses "Theme Statements" to provide the historic rationale and national context for the planning and development of each site. Our overriding goals are to conserve, commemorate, manage and interpret site resources.

In the case of Rocky Mountain House, three themes have been identified:

- The role of the posts at Rocky Mountain House in the fur trade of the northern plains and adjacent Rocky Mountain area, covering the historical period of their existence from 1799 to 1875.
- Native peoples, their culture and association with the fur trade at Rocky Mountain House, with special emphasis on the tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy.
- Exploration by the fur trade companies, focusing on David Thompson and the various transmountain expeditions.

These themes provide direction for the management, development and interpretation of Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site.

The Rocky Mountain House lands today contain the buried remains of the fur trade era posts, and two reconstructed chimneys. The current natural setting presents a fairly accurate impression of the historic landscape.

The Canadian Parks Service uses "Objectives" to direct the presentation of a site's themes. The objectives for Rocky Mountain House are:

- To protect and enhance the natural and cultural resources located on the site.
- To protect and preserve the archaeological resources associated with the fur trade and native history.
- To provide interpretative facilities and programmes that complement the interpretation of resources at other sites in western Canada devoted to the fur trade theme — in order to give visitors an understanding and appreciation of the distinct character and national significance of the site, as well as the themes represented therein.
- To provide appropriate services and facilities in order to give visitors an enjoyable, educational and safe on-site experience, providing they respect the integrity of the historic resources.
- To market opportunities available for public enjoyment of the site, in order to increase understanding and appreciation of the historic resources, and to encourage visits to the site and tourism in the area.
- To encourage cooperative ventures with other levels of government and non-government organizations.



Sites offers a range of facilities and services

The Rocky Mountain House Visitor Reception Centre, where most begin their visit, provides an interpretive exhibit, theatre programs, accessible washrooms and a giftshop. Adult and children's strollers are also available. Staff are on hand to welcome visitors and answer questions. Picnic facilities can be found nearby.

Remains of the fur trade posts are linked by a nature trail. Eight locations along the trail are equipped with illustrations and audioguides relating to the history of Rocky Mountain House.

For visitors in a hurry, the shorter loop of the trail offers a walk past fur trade post locations and artifact exhibits. Along the way, audioguides tell the story of the posts.

The longer of the two trail loops leads through a similar natural environment to that which the traders experienced. Demonstrations in summer of fur trade life, a self-guiding ethnobotany exhibit, trading post locations, and the bison paddock and observation tower combine for a varied and relaxing hike.

Also located on the historic site are replicas of a York Boat and Red River Cart, exemplifying the principal modes of transportation used by the traders. Other facilities and services include parking, a picnic area and a canoe launching and landing area.

Currently, the park remains open year-round. During the winter services are limited; walkways are not maintained, but snowshoeing and cross-country skiing are welcomed.



Nature complements history at Rocky Mountain House

Natural factors impact on preservation, programming and visitation at the historic site. Here is a brief description of the natural characteristics that provide the setting for Rocky Mountain House:

The historic site is found on a floodplain of the North Saskatchewan River, 80 kilometres east of the ranges of the Rocky Mountains. The climate is continental. The average annual temperature is 3 C; from May to September the average is 12 C. Annual precipitation is 540 mm; from May to September it is 370 mm.

Rocky Mountain House is located in the Boreal Foothills Ecoregion, a transition zone between high-relief landforms of the mountains to the west and the central Alberta Plains to the east. Here, climatic and geographic factors combine to determine local vegetation characteristics.

The Boreal Foothills Ecoregion includes landscapes and vegetation communities that provide prime habitats for a variety of wildlife species. Wildlife observed at the site include the white-tailed and mule deer, moose, red squirrel, snowshoe hare, muskrat, mink, ruffed grouse, and several species of waterfowl. Rare or endangered wildlife species in the site have not been recorded.

Recently, the Canadian Parks Service introduced Plains bison to the historic site. The small herd originated in Elk Island National Park and seems to have adapted to its new home.

Portions of the site have been, and continue to be, leased for hay production, grazing, cattle/bison ranching and oil and gas production. The site has undergone some alterations: the erection of buildings, roads, and fences, as well as telephone lines, power services and pipelines constructed by utility companies active in the area.



Companies erected posts to draw trade with Indians

The North West Company and its rival, the Hudson's Bay Company, established posts in the Rocky Mountain House area in order to attract the trade of the Kootenay Indians. Because of the Kootenays' long-standing hostilities with the Blackfoot, however, that trade was inconsistent and short-lived. Trading did occur with the Peigan of the Blackfoot Alliance. Cree also did business with the companies, but they were encouraged to trade farther north at Fort Edmonton in order to prevent conflict with their long-time rivals, the Blackfoot. Historical data indicate that Gros Ventres, Blood, Stoney, and Sarcee also traded at these posts.

The North West Company planned to use its post as a base in the search for a practical route to the Pacific Ocean. According to historian Hugh Dempsey, the posts were more than just "a local establishment to serve the Indians; they were a link with the unknown lands to the west and with the unknown prairies to the south." Prominent visitors to these posts included surveyor David Thompson (who used Rocky Mountain House as a base for his explorations of 1800-1802 and 1806-1807), artist Paul Kane, geologist Sir James Hector, and Alexander Henry the Younger.

In 1821, the Hudson's Bay Co. and North West Co. merged. The resulting company maintained a post

in the area in order to obtain the trade of the Blackfoot, Peigan and other northern plains Indians. The last post was occupied from 1868 to 1875, then abandoned in favour of a new trading outlet adjacent to Fort Calgary. By the 1870s, the Confederacy trade at Rocky Mountain House had been entirely drawn off by the Americans.

In the years following the 1875 abandonment, little occurred in the area. Settlers didn't begin to arrive in numbers until the early 1900s. In 1911, the Hudson's Bay Co. purchased the land occupied by the deserted fur trade post. The Brierley family arrived from southern Alberta in 1922 and rented the land; six years later, the family bought it. In 1926, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada recognized the fur trade post at Rocky Mountain House as a "site of national importance." The board's recognition led to the erection of a cairn and plaque in 1931.

Farming was the central activity on the post lands for the next three decades. Various efforts were made over the years to save and develop the site, culminating in 1970, with federal government purchase of the Brierley farm. Archaeological and historical research beginning in the 1960s led to the discovery of the four posts on the site, and their probable identification through artifact analysis and pictorial evidence.



Archaeological studies unfold secrets of historic site

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board recommended in 1926 that the Rocky Mountain House site be declared of national importance. At that time, officials believed that only one post existed. It wasn't until the 1970s, after the Canadian Parks Service acquired the site, that the exact number of post sites and their precise locations were ascertained. The four distinct sites are shown on the adjoining map.

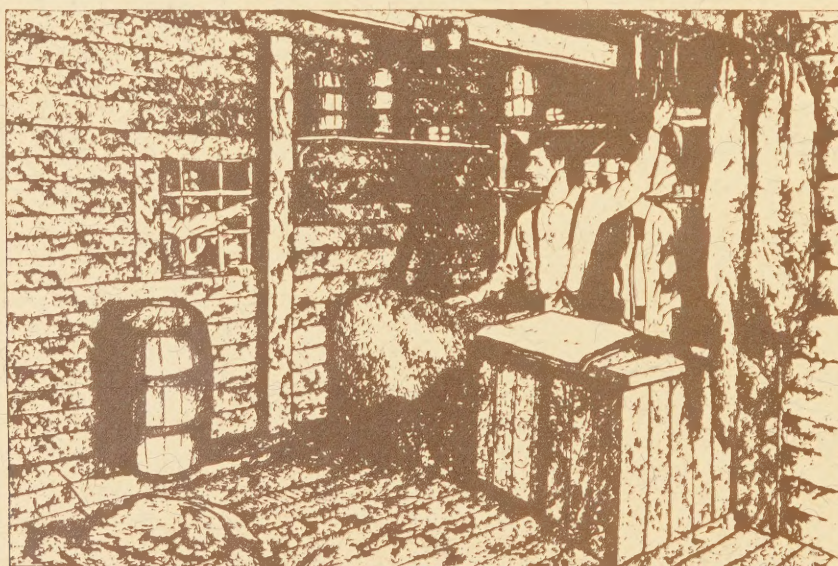
A fifth archaeological site (17R), now occupied by the gas plant, is a burial ground from the time of the fur trade. Graves from this area have been relocated to a site near 15R. Archaeologists believe that potential exists for the discovery of additional pioneer burial grounds at Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site.

Management concerns regarding historical resources include the erosion of the banks of the North Saskatchewan River, ground squirrel activity and ice damage caused by river flow regulation.



Artifacts and reproductions on display

Historic resources at Rocky Mountain House include artifacts on display in the Visitor Reception Centre and reproduction objects used in costumed interpretive demonstrations. Since their installation in the 1970s, the exhibits have been altered to reflect changes to the interpretive programs. A review was undertaken in 1989 by Western Regional Office and park staff to improve the quality of the displays. The Canadian Parks Service will complete an inventory and curatorial/conservation assessment of the objects on display, as well as elsewhere on the site, in conjunction with the management planning process.



Survey finds historic site popular among visitors

A three-part survey was conducted for Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site during the summer of 1990. Adult visitors were given a mail-back survey, visiting children were handed specialized surveys, and a telephone survey was conducted in order to reach non-visitors.

The results of the survey were particularly valuable in confirming the planning team's prior assumptions. Highlights of the survey include:

- Families and school groups are the site's largest visitor groups.
- It was the first visit for most survey participants.
- The length of stay of most visitors was 1-2 hours; several spent more than 3 hours.
- There is a very high interest in learning more about native history at Rocky Mountain House, the lifestyles of the traders, and David Thompson exploration.
- Of adults surveyed, 90% said they would return and 96% said they would recommend the site to friends or relatives. Children were equally positive.
- When participants were asked to hypothetically prioritize funding distribution to the park, conservation and research rated highly.
- The most frequently stated motive for visiting was "enjoyment of nature, scenery or history."
- Most visitors view the interpretive display and/or take the short walk during their visit.
- About a third of people prefer video and slide presentations as a form of learning.
- Of those surveyed by telephone, 39% said they enjoyed guided tours by uniformed staff; 23% said they prefer live theatre.

- Of those surveyed at the site, 25% said they enjoyed guided tours by uniformed staff, while 39% preferred the live theatre.
- Most indicated that they would find self-guided tours interesting.
- Reasons for not visiting the site included "no time" and "location."
- Word-of-mouth was the most commonly used source for obtaining visitor information about the site.
- A very low percentage said that Rocky Mountain House was the single destination of their trip.
- Of adult visitors, 33% pre-planned their stop.
- Of adult visitors, 42% made the decision to stop at the site enroute to another destination.
- Of adult visitors, 23% identified the directions to the site as deficient.
- The most significant barrier to visitation seems to be a lack of awareness of both the historic site and what is offered here.

Several suggestions were made for Rocky Mountain House's interpretive displays. They included improving labeling, signs and lighting, providing more artifacts, and repairing or restoring artifacts. Suggestions were also made for additional services, including providing more picnic tables, planting shade trees and providing more benches.

Due to the manner of data collection and the hours of those visitors using the south end of the historic site (Brierley Rapids), many of the site's river users were not contacted. In order to ensure that we have information on their use patterns and their suggestions for the management of the historic site, meetings have been arranged with river users.

Planners examine leisure trends of Canadians

Changes in the leisure patterns of Canadians can have profound impacts upon the facilities and services provided by the Canadian Parks Service.

Here are a few of the latest trends in society that affect agencies offering leisure-time services:

- Leisure activities with a focus on education are becoming more popular.
- Use of package tours is on the rise.
- People are taking more, but shorter, vacations.
- The population is aging.
- Recreational users are seeking "experiences," not

just facilities and services.

- Concern for the environment is a high public priority.

Leisure trends help in projecting the possible future use characteristics of Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site. They are used in conjunction with the information from visitor surveys, and what we know about the natural and historic resources at the site, to help the planning team establish a management concept that best meets our mandate.



Parks service policy supports Rocky Mountain House

The mandate of the Canadian Parks Service is “to protect for all time those places which are significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage, as well as to encourage public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of this heritage in ways that leave it unimpaired for future generations.”

Canadian Parks Service policy provides an integrated and comprehensive statement to guide future initiatives and direct more detailed policy statements for the management of specific sites.

The approach to cultural resource management at Rocky Mountain House arises from the principle that respect for the future of the cultural resources

and preservation of their integrity should influence all activities related to the site.

The Canadian Parks Service, along with a growing international contingent of heritage protectors, subscribes to the principle that the past should be depicted only with basis in knowledge, rather than by the uncertainty of conjecture.

Rocky Mountain House is supported by and operated under Canadian Parks Service principles and policy statements. Together, they are an assurance for the visitor to Rocky Mountain House of the authenticity of the presentation of this national historic site.

Alberta's cultural history profile on the rise

For a number of years, Rocky Mountain House has been the only developed national historic site in Alberta, outside of the national parks, that is administered by the Canadian Parks Service.

Recently, however, the Canadian Parks Service has increased its involvement with historic site initiatives in Alberta. In 1988, for example, an agreement was signed with the Eastern Irrigation District and Alberta Culture to develop the Brooks Aqueduct as a national and provincial site of historical significance.

In 1990, Canada's Green Plan set as a national goal the protection and commemoration of the historical heritage important to all Canadians. It called for the commemoration of seven key historic themes by 1996, and an additional eight by the year 2000. To help achieve this goal, the parks service is pursuing the commemoration of Alberta ranching as one of the pioneering backbones of western Canada.

The Canadian Parks Service is currently exploring cost-sharing and cooperative ventures for three other national historic sites in Alberta.

Where do we go from here ? ? ? . . .

Progress is being made on preparing a comprehensive management plan for Rocky Mountain House. The planning team has been assembling information about the park's resources, their use and potential. Analysis of this information will lead to the development of a list of the strengths, weaknesses, issues and opportunities of the site to be considered in the planning program.

You can help us with this task. If there are issues or concerns you feel need to be addressed in the Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site Management Plan, please write and let the planning team know. The planning team is available to meet with any organizations and community members wishing to obtain more information and/or discuss the management plan. To submit comments, or to arrange a meeting, please contact:

Dan Gaudet, Superintendent
Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site
Box 2130
Rocky Mountain House, Alberta
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Phone: 403-845-2412
Fax: 403-845-5320

If you are not on our mailing list and would like to be added, please send us your address and we will ensure that you receive future updates on the management planning program. Send requests to be on the mailing list to:

Public Consultation Coordinator
Canadian Parks Service
Rm. 520, 220 4th Ave. S.E.
Box 2989, Station M
Calgary, Alberta
T2P 3H8

With your help, we will be able to produce a management plan that will definitively guide the operation of Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site for the coming 15 years. Thank you for your interest in the future of Rocky Mountain House, and for participation in the preparation of this management plan. We look forward to hearing from you!



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